

# Lively Health Fairs in Rural Oklahoma



Shirley Brooks

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*Mrs. Brooks, administrative assistant to the medical director of the Creek County Department of Public Health (Okla.), was chairman of the comprehensive health planning task force of Creek County which planned the health fairs described. Tearsheet requests to Mrs. Shirley Brooks, Creek County Department of Public Health, P.O. Box 618, Sapulpa, Okla. 74066.*

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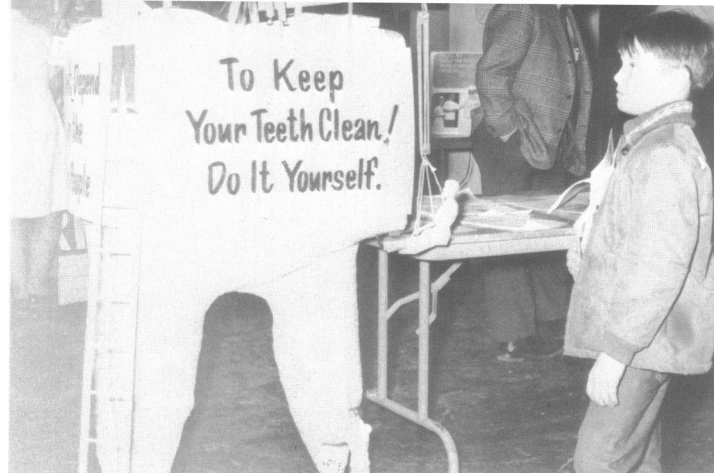
Health fairs in Creek County (Okla.) drew so many entries from school children in 1970 that 160 more award ribbons than planned had to be hastily supplied. The children entered 1,850 items in the three 1-day fairs held in school gymnasiums of the county's three principal towns, March 18–20. Primarily rural, Creek County has a population of 44,984 and covers 972 square miles. Its three major towns—Bristow, Drum-

right, and Sapulpa—are about 25 miles apart.

The decision to conduct the fairs was made by the Creek County Comprehensive Health Planning Task Force, of which I am chairman. At the meeting at which the decision was taken, members of the task force present besides myself included a dentist, a construction man, a nursing home administrator, a hospital administrator, a furniture store



*Young visitor to health fair talks to a robot about health.*



*Tooth exhibit, by Pat Ross, 8th grade, Lone Star School, Sapulpa.*

owner, a housewife, and a farmer. Other task force members subsequently became active in supporting the fairs—a public health nurse, a public health social worker, a retired school superintendent, a business woman, teachers, school administrators, an additional hospital administrator, a mayor, a pharmacist, and physicians.

This task force had originally been established to participate with the task forces of seven adjacent counties in organizing an eight-county health commission—the Central Oklahoma Economic Development District (COEDD)—under the Federal Partnership for Health legislation. Because of the potential of our task force, we decided not to disband after the health commission was established but to continue to plan and work on other health matters. Therefore we continued to hold meetings throughout 1969 to discuss county health needs and ways to meet them.

One of these needs, it became apparent, was health education. Questions were raised at one of the meetings as to the health education county school children were receiving. Members of the task force expressed the belief that more such education was needed and came to the conclusion that health fairs afforded one of the

best means of reaching this target group—school children from Head Start through the 12th grade.

The group accordingly decided to hold health fairs in the county in 1970 and proceeded with the preliminary planning for them. An outline was prepared to serve as a guide, which gave the purpose of the fairs, the proposed method of conducting them (through the schools), the grades to be covered, categories of items that might be entered, possible sources of awards and trophies, possible sites for the fairs and areas each site would draw from, tentative dates and hours, and so forth.

### **Enlisting Educators' Help**

Members of the task force knew that the help of teachers would need to be enlisted, since the target of the fairs was school children. We stated in the outline: "We realize that without the interest and support of school officials, our fairs have little chance of success. If teachers wish to incorporate fair activities within the framework of their class activities, we will be pleased. Preliminary surveys indicate that many teachers will welcome this increased emphasis on health. If classroom time is not available, however, we shall be most grateful if the teacher is able to encourage student participation."

To enlist the educators' help, we sent out copies of the outline with letters asking them to come to a planning session of the task force on January 19 at 7:30 p.m. in Sapulpa. Health and welfare officials and heads of voluntary organizations and their staff members were also invited. The meeting had to be postponed on account of a blizzard. On January 26, however, 42 educators, physicians, dentists, representatives of voluntary health agencies, members of the county health department, and health consumers met with the task force. It was decided that packets with information sheets about the fairs, as well as materials on health and disease, would be supplied to all elementary school teachers in the county, as well as to junior and senior high school homeroom teachers and teachers of art, science, biology, and other appropriate subjects.

The materials on health and disease—three dozen different pieces of information on immunization, nutrition, tuberculosis, diabetes, heart disease, and so forth—were supplied by the Tulsa-Lakes Area Tuberculosis and Health Association, the State health department, the Oklahoma Heart Association, the National Dairy Council, and other organizations. Even if the teachers did not use these materials



*Sapulpa fireman demonstrating mouth to mouth resuscitation on Resuci-Anne*

in connection with the health fairs, the materials could be—and were—used as a basis for health reference libraries in the classrooms. The 300 health information packets with instructions were delivered to the schools on February 11 by the five local health nurses and the social worker from the county health department. The nurses picked up the completed entry forms a few days before the fairs began so that adequate space could be provided at the fair sites for the entries.

Handbills about the fairs were also sent out to all elementary school children, and posters were put up in junior and senior high schools.

### **Others Who Helped**

Four local Business and Professional Women's Clubs agreed to co-sponsor the fairs and provided 36 trophies for first, second, and third place winners in each division at the three fairs. Several businessmen provided door prizes. The Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company provided electrical hookups. The Central Oklahoma Economic Development District donated mimeograph paper. The Creek County Health Department furnished postage and other necessities. A local radio station, KREK, provided all the air time requested

to publicize the fair. County newspapers—the *Sapulpa Herald*, *Drumright Derrick*, and *Bristow News*—donated space for publicity. A Tulsa television station KTUL-TV, provided \$1,120 in air time for 21 spots of 60 seconds each promoting the fair. The *Tulsa World* and *Tulsa Tribune* published stories about the fairs. The task force alerted as many public officials as was feasible about the fairs—U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, the State Commissioner of Health, and the President of the United States.

Dr. A. B. Colyar, State Commissioner of Health, presented the sweepstake trophies at the fairs. County commissioners, mayors, and city commissioners assisted by proclaiming Health Fair Days, Health Fair Weeks, and by renaming a main business street for 1 day as "Health Avenue."

Dr. Gerald Zumwalt, medical director of the county health department, lent his support to the fairs. Sanitarians of the department helped prepare the exhibit areas and performed other useful tasks, and secretaries of the department kept the mimeograph machines smoking.

### **Exhibits**

School children were encouraged to enter art work (posters,

health cartoons, and the like), demonstrations ("show and tell"—both written and oral), experiments, slogans, and spot announcements. An exhibit could occupy only a given-sized space. An entry might be made by either a person or a group. All entries were to be accepted at 1 o'clock on the day of the fair. Each fair was to be held from 3 to 4 p.m. and from 7:30 to 9:30 in the evening. It was announced that the State health department would present special certificates to any teacher who encouraged a child to submit an entry to the fair who subsequently won a trophy.

Severe snowstorms struck right before the fairs, but the weather cleared by the opening date, March 18. At the end of the third day, some 2,500 persons had attended the fairs in the three towns.

School children entered 1,850 items in the three fairs. At each fair, the entries were judged after the close of school and before the evening sessions. Acting as judges were physicians, nurses, dentists, educators, and representatives of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs that co-sponsored the fairs.

One of the school children's exhibits was a replica of a human heart. A light came on, and the heart pulsed. In another ex-



*Drug exhibit by State and local health department guidance programs arouses school children's curiosity.*

hibit, four miniature people were shown climbing around on a paper-mache tooth about 4 by 2 feet, cleaning it with toothbrushes. A tape recorder inside a robot lectured on good health practices. In one "show and tell" entry, third graders in costume recited and sang. One child was a rat that didn't brush his teeth. Five boys put on a skit set in an Old West type saloon. Seated around a table in western outfits, they simulated drinking and smoking. Each had a few lines to say about cigarettes. One by one they finally all collapsed—from smoking them. School children wrote some of the spot announcements that were used on radio.

Among the organizations with educational exhibits were the environmental health section of the county health department, the five civilized Indian tribes—in conjunction with community health representatives and staff members of the Public Health Service Indian Hospital in Claremore, the Tulsa-Lakes Area Tuberculosis and Health Association, the Oklahoma Heart Association, the Vocational Technical School of Practical Nursing at Drumright, the fire

department of Sapulpa (whose exhibit with Resuci-Anne and baby was a great success), and the Oklahoma Council for Health Careers. Bartlett Memorial Hospital of Sapulpa had an exhibit on microscopes. A Marine Corps film on drug abuse was shown. Components of the State health department with educational exhibits included the immunization project, maternal and child health section, guidance center (a joint departmental effort of the State and county health departments on guidance services) with an exhibit on drugs, consumer health protection section, venereal disease control section, and home health care section. The tuberculosis and health association's exhibit included a mannekin smoking and showed the effect on the lungs.

### **After the Fairs**

When the fairs were over, outstanding exhibits were placed in banks, city halls, and prominent downtown locations. They were also later displayed at the 1970 Oklahoma Public Health Association meeting and then at State health department offices.

The success of the 1970 fairs has stimulated the planning of similar fairs in 1971. The 1971 dates are already set. The committees which were organized to plan, arrange for, and conduct the fairs, however, have not confined their energies to these events. They continue to work on other priority health activities, such as promotion of a 1 mill levy for operation of the Creek County Health Department. They are seeking to enlist support for the levy by articles in newspapers, speeches to various clubs, and other appropriate means.

News of the successful fairs in Creek County, moreover, has spread. Other Oklahoma counties have requested, and received, assistance from the health planning task force of Creek County in planning their own health fairs.



*Student explains her heart exhibit to visitors to health fair.*